

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT
DEVELOPMENT
AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY
GAL/AMC TRAINING PROGRAM
QUINNIPIAC UNIVERSITY SCHOOL
OF LAW
HARRY ADAMAKOS, PH.D.
BRIDGEPORT GREENWICH
ADAMAKOS@SBCGLOBAL.NET
(203) 335-0345

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE INSPIRED

- Good Social Judgment
- Intelligence
- Good Intentions
- Some Education
- Some Experience

PLEASE KEEP IT SIMPLE

- Child and adolescent development theory is simply a restatement of things we know in a standardized context
- Psychologists “tell people things they already know, using language that they can’t understand.”
- Find a few ideas that organize your thinking and reduce your anxiety. Then go out and talk with some children.

DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT

- Children and adolescents in divorce are in transition
 - What we see during divorce may not be typical
- Divorce is traumatic
 - We see the interplay of stress on resilience
- Divorce is experienced differently
 - Age, culture, socioeconomic issues are critical to understanding
- Acknowledging similarities is as important as acknowledging differences

PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- **Intrapsychic:** Freud offers us an opportunity to reflect on the development of the inner life of the child
- **Psychosocial:** Erikson offers us the opportunity to reflect on the development of a child's psychosocial world.
- **Behavioral:** Behaviors learned through the reinforcements that have been received
- **Cognitive:** Piaget reflects on the development of cognition and the differences between various stages of child development

INTRAPSYCHIC

- Freud is helpful for a historical context
- Theory addresses the issue of the development of the inner life of the child
- Framework implies importance of early life experience and the need to resolve early life conflicts for normal development

FREUDIAN DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY OVERVIEW

- **Oral** (Birth-18mos) Getting Hold Of
- **Anal** (18-36mos) Letting Go Of
- **Phallic** (3-6yrs) Creating Own Pleasure
- **Latency** (6yrs-puberty) Creating Limits
- **Genital** (Puberty-) Balancing Expression and Acceptance of Limits

FREUDIAN PERSONALITY THEORY OVERVIEW

- **ID**: Basic drives; sex/aggression
- **SUPEREGO**: Socialization, limit-setting, moral demands
- **EGO**: Managing the needs of the **Id** while also balancing **Superego** demands

Freud's contribution to the divorce scenario

- We must pay attention to the inner world of the child. What we see is not all that exists.
- Children at different ages are preoccupied with different things. The world for them begins with them and gradually expands as they grow.
- Children's world is accumulative. They populate their inner world as they grow and become less reliant on the world around them.
- Children prepare for independence by mastering dependence.
- Adults play a critical role in supporting children while they grow and master independence.

GAL/AMC TOOLKIT

- Consider the world as the child has experienced it. Who are the players? How have they contributed to the child's understanding of themselves?
- Consider the degree of reliance that the child has on the players in his or her inner world. How consistent and stable have they been?
- Consider the impact on the child of the changing external world on his inner life. How able is he or she to hold constant those important people without their presence?

Possible Implications- So What?

Freud says that development of a stable, primary object is critical to the development of trust and accrues to later relationships,
....so, from this perspective, overnight visitation for a very young child might not be a good idea despite the bond between her and the parent from whom she is to be separated (a really big problem if she has bonded with both parents)
Freud says that latency age children (8-12) begin to internalize the limit setting that has been, up until then, primarily provided by their caretakers,
.....so parents who have been preoccupied by their own needs and other distractions may not have created clear enough external limits for children to internalize. Who provides consistent, stable, and reasonable limits?

So...

Freud says that preadolescent kids require stable objects and relationships,
.....therefore, firm parenting, clear and consistent rules in each parent's home and non-ambiguous expectations would be good tasks for divorcing parents with children this age.

So...for instance

- Freud says that adolescent kids begin to focus on the attribute of empathy,then by extension they may also be developing a better understanding of others.
Imagine how they experience the response of their parents in the midst of the divorce process.

- Issues of what children may need, parental preference, and alienation are far more subtle than we have previously imagined.

FREUDIAN THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

- While Freud's research is primarily case-study and based on anecdotal information, recent research on the neurobiology of attachment is quite supportive.
- Current research evidence is quite clear in stating that early life experiences are critical in developing capacities to manage later life challenges.

PSYCHOSOCIAL

- Erikson helps us be aware of the growing interpersonal and social world of the child.
- We must be mindful that the child's world begins with intimate caregivers and development continues to broaden outward into nuclear family, extended family, community, and culture.
- Conflict at each developmental stage is normal and desirable. Resolving the conflict creates the energy of developmental growth. As was true with Freud, a lack of resolution creates vulnerabilities that may become manifest later in life.

ERIKSON IN THE DIVORCE CONTEXT

- Normal, developmental conflict may occlude or be confused with conflicts stemming from the divorce scenario. While conflict may be normal, conflict resolution is variable.
- Childrens' ability to shift to new social surroundings may be reliant on the degree of successful resolution of prior developmental conflict.
- Parents' ability to remain engaged in healthy conflict with their children may rely on their own degree of developmental adaptation.

ERIKSONIAN PERSONALITY THEORY OVERVIEW (BIRTH THRU ADOLESCENCE)

- **Trust vs. Mistrust** (First year of life) Conflict regarding dependency. Formation of attachment is essential
- **Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt** (2-3yrs) Conflict regarding regulation of behavior. Development of self-care skills is essential
- **Initiative vs. Guilt** (4-6yrs) Conflict regarding own needs and family needs. Development of ability to "get along" is important
- **Industry vs. Inferiority** (6yrs-puberty) Conflict regarding functioning well despite decreasing structure. Development of ability to function independently is critical
- **Identity vs. Confusion** (Adolescence) Conflict regarding establishing individual differences in the context of a multitude of influences. Development of individual identity (somewhat separate from parents and peers) is important

So...for instance

Because Erikson says that young children manifest a conflict between Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt at 3 years of age and that the development of self-help skills is important in successfully resolving that conflict,
then having a parent who is unable to allow a child to fail for fear of being judged critically (as in the midst of a custody evaluation) may be counterproductive to healthy growth.

Because Erikson says that children at 8 years of age or so require experiences outside of their family in which to develop a sense of competence and self-esteem,
then having to move from place to place weekly (or leaving a place where they have deep ties) can threaten that sense and create self-doubt and inferiority

Also ...

Because Erikson says that preadolescent kids begin to shift away from their family for support and attachment

.....then, moving kids away from their "home base," which includes neighborhood, school and friends might be difficult and emotionally unsettling (which it is.)

Also ...

- Because Erikson says that adolescent kids are developing a clearer, more autonomous sense of identity

.....then, perhaps the identity shift involved in divorce (intact family to reconstituted family) is stressful for them, but... They may find support in other kids whose parents are divorced or divorcing

THE ALGEBRA OF SELF-ESTEEM
(BEST TAUGHT PRIOR TO ADOLESCENCE)

- $COMPETENCE = Opportunity + Success + Failure$
- $CONFIDENCE = Competence / Time$
- $SELF-ESTEEM = Confidence / Time$

ERIKSON IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

- Resiliency research implies the need for children to exercise autonomy, risk failure, and experience discomfort at a moderate level. This experience seems to inoculate children for conflict later in life.
- Erikson's emphasis on life-span development appears consistent with neuropsychological research in suggesting that growth and development can and do occur throughout the life span.

GAL/AMC TOOLKIT

- Consider the healthy value of conflict. Assess children and parents' ability to remain engaged in healthy conflict.
- Be aware of children's relationships within and outside of the family. Older children maintain important relationships outside of their family. These relationships are essential to consider in planning post-divorce scenarios.
- As family relationships become more unclear during transitions, children's needs for clarity do not diminish. Make sure that family members seek and obtain help such that they can remain physically and emotionally available to these relationships.

BEHAVIORISM

- Behavior is the result of an accumulated set of learning over the life span (Pavlov, Watson, Skinner)
- Primarily the result of reinforcement
 - through association (Classical Conditioning)
 - through the application of reinforcement
- (Operant Conditioning)
- Early and repetitive learning becomes habitual
- Caregiving adults are primarily responsible for the early learning of children

Reinforcement

• **Reinforcement** - is the application of a consequence that increases the likelihood of a behavior occurring again

Positive Reinforcement - is pleasurable (e.g. "let's go get ice-cream ... I really appreciate how you helped out around the house today")

Negative Reinforcement - is the removal of an undesirable condition (eg. "you can go out after you have cleaned your room")

Punishment

• **Punishment** is the application of a noxious condition in an attempt to diminish the likelihood of a behavior occurring again

• Not as effective in teaching and learning as is reinforcement, but useful when there is an immediate desire to stop undesirable behavior

• Can be effective in curtailing negative behavior so that positive behaviors can be tried by the child; these positive behaviors can then be reinforced

Possible Implications - So What?

- The opportunity to make changes in one's behavior and personality exists throughout the life span
- Reinforcement is much more powerful than punishment in teaching behavior (especially prosocial behavior).
- Parents are the major teachers of our lives which provide the early templates for our learning
- Consistency in providing reinforcement improves learning ----- for better or worse!
- Changing earlier habits of learning is difficult because we develop "habits of the mind."

So ...

- Understanding the effects of learning and who primarily taught the child is important
- While there are many factors, whether a child is doing well (or not) is not the result of coincidence
- Is the parenting style primarily controlled reinforcement or punishment?
- Who can provide a more consistent and constructive learning experience for a younger child?
- Who can provide, monitor, and guide the learning experience of an older child or adolescent?

So ... for instance

- PARENTING STYLES
 - Laissez Faire - Not providing enough supervision and structure to provide sufficient and consistent reinforcement
 - Authoritarian - Over-Utilizes punishment, and does not allow enough freedom to gently learn from small mistakes
 - Authoritative - Provides supervision, structure, and a reliable, consistent set of reinforcements supporting the development of healthy learning

GAL/AMC TOOLKIT

- Reasonable, reliable parenting is important
- Children of all ages need and benefit from supervision, structure, and limits
- But also, they need an opportunity to learn from their own mistakes, so they need enough room to gain their own learning experiences
- Look to parents to be "Authoritative," and if not currently, how realistic is it that they can learn how (maybe a willingness to accept professional help)

COGNITIVE

- Piaget helps us reflect on the process of learning. We learn that children not only learn different things but learn these things in a different way as they grow.
- Children's experience is different than adults'. We must try to move beyond our assumptions that people see things similarly. This extends from obvious value and moral attributes to the most basic perceptive and learning constructs.

PIAGET DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY OVERVIEW

- **Sensorimotor:** (Birth-18mos) Application of motor responses to sensory world. No representational thought
- **Preoperational Thought:** (18mos- 7yrs) Language acquisition occurs here. Children lack the ability to reverse mental operations
- **Concrete Operations:** (7yrs- 11yrs) Children can perform mental operations on concrete objects
- **Formal Operations:** (11yrs-) Children deal with mental processes in a more logical, deductive and systematic manner

PIAGET IN THE DIVORCE CONTEXT

- We must be sure that our recommendations conform to the child's perceptual world. This will involve assessment of the child's sense of time, space and meaning.
- We must acknowledge the difference between the child's experience of the world and that of the adults involved, including ourselves.
- We must be aware of the differences in language and value in creating meaningful interventions for the children in divorce situations.

Possible Implications – So What?

Because Piaget says that children prior to the age of 3 lack object permanence,"
.....then physical separation from a parent creates the possibility of a fear for the child that the parent will never return (or worse, that they never existed.)
Because Piaget says that children at the level of Formal Operations (age 11) can begin to appreciate abstractions and can manage reversible cognitive operations,
.....then discussing various configurations of family life may be possible with them.

So ...

- Piaget says that adolescent kids can begin to think and problem solve in a forward planning manner,

.....then, *maybe* kids at this age in a divorce process can offer valuable information as to issues of parenting plans and needs for various supports, at least from a cognitive perspective.

PIAGET IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RESEARCH

- Much of Piaget's original theory has been replaced with more specific understanding of cognitive development. Research tools now allow us to see and document things that Piaget was only able to study in terms of behavior.
- Piaget stands however as a clear milestone in our need to understand that children are not simply small adults in a cognitive sense.

GAL/AMC TOOLKIT

- Avoid abstractions when speaking to younger children. Concrete examples are much more helpful than metaphors.
- If possible use physical examples, diagrams and drawings. Involve children in the process to determine their understanding of your meaning.
- Learn to assess the cognitive/developmental level of the children you work with. Find tools that you are comfortable with.
- Be certain that you are understood as you intend to be.

PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN CHILDREN

- Think description, not diagnosis
- Cultivate appreciation for behavior/emotion in context of
 - Stage of development
 - Extent of current stress
 - Availability of supports
 - Intactness of resiliency resources
- Develop respect for the biological aspect to emotional/behavioral problems

AN OVERLY-SIMPLE PARADIGM OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Anxiety+++++++++Depression

ANXIETY

Anxiety is everywhere on some level
Enormous evolutionary significance
Emanates from old neurological structure
Signals general discomfort or potential threat. Like a fire alarm, it signals a need for attention, alertness, response

Clear biological basis

PRESENTATION OF ANXIETY

- Over-reactive
- Avoidance
- Regressive
- Restricted cognition, problem-solving, risk taking
- Can manifest as Anger
- When chronic, can lead to hypervigilance

DEPRESSION

Clear biological basis
Distinct from sadness, irritability

In a functional context, depression reduces risk of further loss

Reduced behavioral response.
"Learned Helplessness"

Signals need for caretaking, support

PRESENTATION OF DEPRESSION

- Hypo responsive
- Isolative
- Withdrawn
- Restricted problem- solving, cognition, risk taking
- Regressive
- Internalized blame/responsibility

COMMONLY FOUND DIAGNOSES

- Adjustment Disorders
- Mood Disorders
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
- Learning Disorders
- Attention Deficit and Disruptive Behavior Disorders
- Personality Disorders

ADJUSTMENT DISORDERS

- Presume an identifiable stressor
- Clinically significant symptoms
 - Create impairment in one or more domain
- No other Axis I impairment
- Once the stressor is terminated, the symptoms do not persist

MOOD DISORDERS

- Mood disorders are theoretically as prevalent in adolescents as in adults.
- It is critical to consider the developmental, hormonal and social stressors in making this diagnosis.
- Consider the adaptive function of these symptoms when thinking about this as pathology.

LEARNING DISORDERS

- As much of learning processes are linear and additive, distractions at a specific point in time can impact on the eventual outcome.
- Undiagnosed learning problems can become apparent in the context of school moves, social distractions or exacerbated psychopathology.

ADHD AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR DISORDERS

- References in childhood are usually evident but presentation may be masked by more adaptive supports
- Strong developmental overlay, particularly for disruptive behavior disorders.
- Mild Inattention may present with significant outcomes at this age.

PERSONALITY DISORDERS

- Be very wary of diagnoses in reports of children this age
- Personality disorders do occur in this age group however are far more likely to represent developmental or intensity variables (i.e. adjustment disorders)
- Treatment requires long-term commitment, and insight. Both difficult commodities for adolescents.

In Conclusion...

- Child development is best understood in the context of age, culture, and family dynamics.
- Psychopathology also is best understood in context.
- Children's presentation during stress may not reflect underlying dysfunction. Normal is much more usual than abnormal. There is some benefit to not over-pathologizing stress reactions.
- While considering children's pathological response to acute or chronic stress, also reflect on their resilience, available supports and prior level of functioning.
- Most importantly, call a mental health colleague if you need any help.
